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ABSTRACT

In order to focus on important contributions of elementary school instructional media centers (IMC's) to the educational program, a study was conducted to determine the presence of conditions of positive self-concept--cooperation, independence, success, positive atmosphere, challenge, feeling of value or acceptance--in such centers. A descriptive, case study research design using observation, interviews, and a diary of IMC activities was used in three Wisconsin elementary schools having IMC programs with a full-time professional media specialist and an aide. Schools represented a rural, an urban, and a suburban setting. Observable indicators for the six conditions examined were determined by a panel of library and media experts. All six conditions were present in the sample schools, indicating that the IMC can influence development of a positive self-concept in individual children. Some expected activities, such as production, did not occur. The media specialists interviewed generally believed in students' individual worth and the need for media programs to support that worth. Nine references are listed and the observation checklists used are appended. (Author/LMM)

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PRESENCE OF OBSERVABLE CONDITIONS OF POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY[1]

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[1] Research for this paper was taken from the author's doctoral dissertation, which was completed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the direction of Dr. Ann D. Becker.

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Observable Conditions of Positive Self-Concept
in Elementary School Media Centers

Introduction and Purpose

The following situation occurs too often. School district officials find that they must make cutbacks in the district's budget. They determine that the position of instructional media specialist* at the elementary level should be eliminated; OR, having never felt that a professionally-run IMC program at the elementary level was important, they have never had a professional media specialist at the elementary level. In Wisconsin, for example, it is estimated that 69 percent of the elementary schools lack professionals either on a full- or part-time basis in the media center.

Actions speak louder than words. In a glaring way, it is obvious that decision-makers and citizens on the whole are not convinced that elementary school IMCs make a necessary and important difference to a young child's education. Perhaps this is due to the lack of concrete research which focuses on the contributions of instructional media center (IMC) programs to educational programs.

In an effort to focus on important contributions of elementary school IMCs to the educational program, a study was conducted (McAfee, 1981) to determine the presence of conditions of positive self-concept in elementary school IMCs. The purpose of the study was to determine whether an elemencary school IMC with a full-time media specialist, full-time aide, variety of current printed and audiovisual materials, and a program of activities and services had components which could be identified as being those which could

* instructional media specialist: a person with appropriate certification and broad professional preparation, both in education and media (library and audiovisual areas), with competencies to carry out a media program. The media specialist is the basic instructional media professional in the school media program.

be said to promote or enhance positive self-concepts in elementary school students. The following conditions which appeared most frequently in self-concept literature were selected for study: cooperation, independence, success, positive atmosphere, challenge, feeling of value or acceptance.

Background

In order to focus most clearly on self-concept contributions in an elementary IMC setting, it was necessary to examine theories of self-concept and learning, in general, and their applicability to school settings, including the goal and aims of school IMCs. The examination provided a strong theoretical basis for the study.

The literature is consistent in its emphasis on the effect of a child's early years in the development of a self-concept. Major theorists as early as William James in his 1890 historic book, Principles of Psychology, and continuing through Freud in the 1900s, provided theoretical foundations for beliefs in the importance of self-concepts. In the 1920s, social psychologists Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and Harry Stack Sullivan, in the 1930s, George Mead and Gordon Allport, and beginning in the 1940s, Abraham Maslow — all supported the importance of self-concept.

The emphasis on formation of concepts of self in the early years is supported by research of Coopersmith (1967), Gordon (1972), Purkey (1970), Quandt (1972), and Rogers (1969). While literature on the early years and self-concept put greatest emphasis on the home and its environment, particularly on the role of parents, schools also were found to influence a child's self-concept. In fact, some, like Purkey (1970), found that next to the home, the school was the single most important force in shaping the child's self-concept.

Self-concept would probably not receive so much attention were it not for its relationship to learning. While research data do not provide clear-cut evidence of what comes first--a positive self-concept or scholastic success--the data stress a strong reciprocal relationship and provide evidence that enhancing the self-concept is a vital influence in improving academic performance (Purkey, 1970).

With schools having such an important part in shaping self-concept and with scholastic achievement tied to self-concept, it would seem imperative to provide experiences in elementary schools which will reinforce conditions of positive self-concept. A number of previous studies focused on the classroom atmosphere and teacher activities (La Benne and Greene, 1969). Yet classrooms, with their grading system and structure, may not always encourage positive self-concept reinforcement.

Prevailing theories of learning emphasize such basics as:

children learn as individuals

children learn at various rates

children learn according to different styles and patterns

education is a continuous process (Gillespie and Spirt, 1973).

Aims of IMCs are consistent with basic theories of learning, focusing on such common areas as creating the right environment for learning, providing materials, meeting curricular needs, meeting personal and instructional needs of students, encouraging creativity, self-fulfillment, and inquiry. Because of the similarity of aims of school IMCs and major factors contributing to self-concept, namely cooperation, independence, success, positive atmosphere, challenge, feeling of value or acceptance, the study examined the broad question of whether the IMC and its staff contribute to a positive

self-concept in children. After this overall objective, other objectives were:

to compare similar IMC programs offered in a rural, an urban, and a suburban setting,

to interpret the impact of the philosophy of the media specialist on the IMC program,

to discover student attitudes toward the IMC, the media specialist, and IMC activities,

to identify those conditions to which the IMC contributed most substantially,

to identify which observed activities most substantially supported each condition studied,

to describe emerging patterns or relationships,

to identify especially desirable IMC activities to promote positive self-concepts, and

to generate hypotheses for further study.

A number of questions were formulated to investigate the overall concern about whether IMC programs have conditions which are said to promote positive self-concept in children. Among the questions, which were divided according to the research method utilized, were the following:

If the IMC programs studied were found to contribute to the condition(s) being examined, did the IMC programs appear to contribute equally?

Were there activities which occurred more or less frequently at certain grade levels than others?

Which activities which were expected to occur did not?

Did the IMC contain or have access to materials which would be appropriate for a variety of learning styles and levels?

Was there evidence of a focus on concrete IMC experiences, such as those which focused on the senses?

How did students feel about using the IMC?

Were there any major differences in student responses by grade level? By sex?

What unique features or commonalities existed by type of IMC?

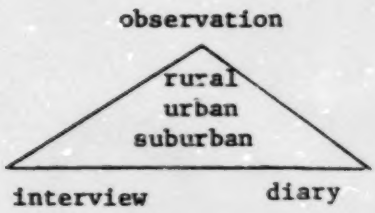
Methodology

The research method was designed to focus on the broad range of activities and experiences available to elementary-age children in school IMCs. All instruments and overall methods were reviewed by a panel of experts which included experienced building-level elementary school media specialists, district-level media director, university professor in librarianship, and state department of education media consultant. Utilizing this panel of experts, two study observers and the researcher, observable indicators were agreed upon for each of the six conditions being examined. (See Appendix A)

The study employed a descriptive case study research design which consisted of the use of observation, interviews, and a diary of IMC activities at each school.

Figure 1

Research Design



In most instances, the research methods, i.e., observation, interviews, diary, were used to obtain data about all the conditions being studied. Table 1 illustrates the conditions described within each method utilized.

TABLE 1

Conditions Studied According to Method Utilized

Method	Condition					
Observations:	Cooperation	Independence	Success	Challenge	Value	Positive Atmosphere
Physical setting				X	X	X
Model	X	X	X			
Interviews	X	X	X	X	X	X
Diary	X	X	X	X	X	X

Following a pilot study, the case study approach was utilized in three Wisconsin elementary schools having IMC programs as described earlier (e.g., full-time professional and aide). The three schools represented a rural, an urban, and a suburban setting. Schools were selected utilizing a survey instrument which had been field-tested. Basic similarities between schools such as size of collection, student enrollment, certification of the media specialist were sought. A system of assigning points to survey information for the purpose of objectively evaluating the surveys was used.

Observation

Instruments designed other than the survey instrument for selection were the observation model used in the on-site study (Appendix B), the breakdown of general IMC activities according to self-concept conditions being

examined (Appendix A), and interviews with media specialists and students.

In actual practice during the week-long case study in each school, activities in the IMC were observed by a full-time observer who used the observation model described in the previous paragraph for five-minute intervals over a one-week period in each school. Inter-observer reliability was attained by having a second observer observe 20 percent of the total week in each school. Observers were trained together. In order to ascertain interobserver reliability, Kappa co-efficients were obtained for each school on the second day of the study. The Kappa co-efficients yielded the following data: rural school reliability between observers was .86; urban school reliability was .87; suburban school reliability was .90. These figures indicate that observations between the two observers were very consistent.

The observation method, in addition to utilizing the observation model, also utilized a description of the physical setting according to predetermined criteria found in Appendix A focusing on the conditions of positive atmosphere, being challenged, and being valued.

Diary

A written diary of all IMC activities was kept throughout the week. Interactions between individual students and the media specialists, between individual students and the aide, as well as interaction between students were particularly noted. Any formal interactions between the media specialist and a class or a group of students were also noted.

Interviews

Student interview questions were asked of some students from each grade beginning at the third grade level in each school studied. Overall, students

represented both sexes, range of normal IQ levels, were conversable, and were representative of various ethnic/minority groups found in the school. Students to be interviewed were selected by media specialists and teachers at each school. Interview questions focused on all conditions being studied, namely cooperation, independence, success, feeling valued/accepted, being challenged, positive atmosphere. Questions asked reflected attitudes toward the IMC, its activities, and its staff.

Interviews with media specialists focused on gaining information on the philosphy undergirding the media program, as well as the perception of the media specialist of student use and preferences, role of teacher and principal, parental support.

Results

Results of the study showed that all six conditions studied were present in the schools being studied. Findings of this study, therefore, indicate that the IMC can make a difference in the individual child's development of a positive self-concept.

The observational data which utilized the model found in Appendix B were submitted to analysis of variance to investigate relationships of observed activities as they related to the type of school and day of the week, to the type of school and the general grade level at which the activity most frequently occured. For those relationships in which statistical significance was found at the .05 level, Scheffés were also performed. The observation instrument focused on the conditions of cooperation, independence, and success. In general, there were no differences existing which varied depending on the day of the week. Some differences by level (e.g., K-3, 4-6) were found. For example, students in grades K-3 cooperatively used

audiovisual equipment and materials more. Students in grades 4-6 studied more in the IMC. Activities were most similar in the rural and suburban schools, for specific activities during the week's visit at the urban school served as attention-getters from usual IMC activities. Some expected activities such as production did not occur.

All schools visited had a stronger emphasis on independence than cooperation. However, the analysis of the observation instrument showed evidence of all the conditions being studied, namely independence, cooperation, and success.

The physical setting description in each IMC showed evidence of the conditions of positive atmosphere, feeling of value or acceptance, being challenged.

Student interviews showed that students of each grade found the IMC atmosphere to be positive, felt valued, had many experiences of success as well as opportunities for success, cooperated naturally, and found the IMC to be a place which challenged them.

The media specialists' interviews showed them to be generally of one mind in their belief of the worth of the individual student and the need for media programs to promote that worth.

Diary analysis showed clear examples in each school studied of the conditions being examined.

Each method utilized, i.e. observation, interview, and diary, ultimately complemented one another. Varied emphases of research methods, whether factual, conceptual, or attitudinal, in the final analysis supported and enhanced the findings of the other.

Recommendations for Practice and Further Study

Results of the study point toward providing, wherever possible, elementary

school IMCs which focus on a program which can promote and enhance positive self-concept in elementary school children. The study suggests that those who utilize an elementary school IMC as simply a place where an aide decorates a bulletin board or checks out materials to students are not scratching the surface in terms of what a professionally-directed media program can provide. It suggests that a seemingly natural and spontaneous program of activities and services may bely the amount of planning, time, and effort involved in making it so.

Implications for practice and further research include the following:

1. IMC programs should be designed to promote the development of positive self-concepts in elementary-age children.
2. The philosophy of the teaching staff, as well as the media aide (in addition to the media specialist), also determines how students utilize the IMC.
3. Wherever possible, IMC programs which permit flexible use by students should be encouraged.
4. Further study of each condition included in this study should be conducted independently.
5. Broad studies similar to the one conducted are needed at other levels, including:
   a. IMCs with a half-time professional media specialist and full-time aide,
   b. IMCs with a full-time professional and no aide,
   c. IMCs with a part-time professional and no aide,
   d. IMCs with a full-time aide and no professional,
   e. IMCs with a part-time aide and no professional.

As is important with descriptive studies, replication is encouraged.

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Appendix A

Conditions to be Examined

fostering cooperation
independence
success
positive atmosphere
being challenged
feeling valued/accepted

Fostering cooperation

Observe:

children playing games; activities requiring a minimum of 2 people.

IMC skills activities designed for groups

teaming of primary/intermediate students for storytelling, etc.

peer couple activities. Eg. - studying together, selecting books together, and voluntary couple activities.

Independence (Utilization alone). Observe:

use of audiovisual equipment alone

use of audiovisual materials alone

production of media alone or with limited assistance

ability to use card catalog and find what is being sought

ability to go to IMC alone

Success Observe:

satisfactory participation in or completion of an IMC/game/activity/production

location skills in finding what is desired

steps used in locating and using what is desired

Being challenged

Observe:

presence of variety of materials in varied formats, interests, level of difficulty

presence of games like calendar clues

production opportunities

other activities — write a letter to author, etc.

use of a variety of materials by children, eg. small children using advanced material

Feeling valued/accepted

Observe:

displays of student work in the IMC

work as student assistant (describe)

ease in talking with librarian

ease in seeking help from librarian, others

ease in browsing or seeking out what is needed, even alone

student taking initiative in class discussions in the IMC

Positive Atmosphere (physical characteristics)

Look for:

lots of materials/displays which focus on senses — feel, touch, smell, sight, hearing, and seeing students use them.

presence of equipment, materials, which are accessible, not locked in a closet

decorated in ways that would invite/encourage student use, i.e., warm colors, plants, student work, comfortable furniture, animations, subjects of interest to children.

accessibility for small children — ease of reach to touch and manipulate.

Appendix B

DLS OBSERVATION MODEL

NAME OF OBSERVER: _____ DATE: _____ NAME OF SCHOOL: _____

AREA EXAMINED: _____ TIME PERIOD: _____ AGE GROUP RANGE: _____

FOSTERING COOPERATION / VOLUNTARY — INDEPENDENCE

Freq./How Many Together	Pr.		Pr.	Freq/How Many Alone	Compared to What
		Going to IMC			
		Using card cat.			
		Browsing			
		Select. books			
		Select. AV mat.			
		Check. out books			
		Check. out AV mat.			
		Return. mat.			
		Reading			
		Studying			
		Using AV mat.			
		Using AV equip.			
		Using Int. Ctrs.			
		Production			
		Using models			

		Pr.	Freq/How Many	Compared to What
COOPERATION REQ. VOL.	Teaming of int./primary students			
	Game playing			
	Skills activities together			
INDEPENDENCE REQ. VOL.	Production w/limited assistance			
	Using AV equipment w/limited assistance			
	Skills activities alone			
SUCCESS	Location skills used in searching			
	Satis. participation/completion IMC activities			
	Satis. participation/completion IMC production			
Other:				